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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Mission in Kosovo begins for Rapid City aviation unit

By Staff Sgt. Stein Larsgaard

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo. – Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment (General Services Aviation Battalion), South Dakota Army National Guard, has arrived in Kosovo and has begun its mission to provide 24-hour air medical evacuation for NATO's Kosovo Force.

The 21-member aviation unit, based in Rapid City at the Army Aviation Support Facility, was activated last March for a 12-month tour in support of peacekeeping operations. The deployed Soldiers include pilots, flight medics, crew chiefs and flight operations specialists.

"We received several MEDEVAC (medical evacuation) calls a day during our training that allowed our newer crewmembers to practice and gain experience," said Staff Sgt. Gregg Holland of Rapid City. "It also helped experienced members to fine tune their skills."

Spc. Matt Noble of Sioux Falls said that the training paid off when they launched their first real MEDEVAC in the middle of the night on July 2.

"It was a U.S. Soldier who needed to be treated at Camp Bondsteel Hospital," Noble said. "It was only a 15-minute flight that would have taken an hour by ground."

The unit completed its mobilization process at Camp Atterbury, Ind., and then deployed overseas to train at Hohenfels Combat Maneuver Training Center in Germany before heading to Kosovo.

"We have completed months of training," said Noble. "We are now finally able to do the mission we have been training for, and we are prepared to help out in any way we can."

The unit is now stationed at Camp Bondsteel located in the southeastern portion of Kosovo, south of Pristina. The South Dakota National Guard unit provides medical evacuation support to more than 15,000 troops stationed throughout the area by

responding with the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter and onboard medical specialists. Each aircraft is capable of evacuating up to four critically injured patients and can also be used to transport troops and haul cargo.

The unit deployed with three of its six helicopters and is attached to 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment of the Illinois Army National Guard.

According to Noble, the current living conditions exceeded the unit's expectations as the South Dakota Soldiers moved into "sea huts" that have five large rooms (two-three per room) along with a community bathroom. The base offers two gyms, a large Internet and phone cafe, a Post Exchange, several smaller shops, and fast food places such as Burger King and Taco Bell.

Even though the unit was very busy adjusting to its new environment and mission, members still managed to celebrate a rainy Independence Day and enjoyed a small barbeque on the Fourth of July.

This is the unit's third deployment to the Balkans since 2002 and its fourth deployment overseas in same time frame. In 2002, the unit deployed to Bosnia in support of NATO's Stabilization Force and successfully completed a tour in Kosovo in 2003 in support of the K-FOR mission. This past spring, the unit provided humanitarian support with its medical evacuation capability in support of Operation New Horizons in Nicaragua.

Photo Cut Lines



HPIM0918: CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo – Capt. Michael McDaniel (upper left), Chief Warrant Officer John Wurtz (upper right), Sgt. Shad Tenold, (lower left), and Sgt. Jared Sampson (lower right) form Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment (General Services Aviation Battalion), South Dakota Army National Guard, wait for clearance to launch their first MEDEVAC mission in Kosovo. (Army National Guard courtesy photo)(RELEASED)

Link to photo: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/released/HPIM0918.JPG>

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Maj. Orson Ward at (605) 737-6721, cell (605) 431-8753.

NOTE: Since the terrorist attacks on America, the South Dakota National Guard has mobilized more than 3,100 Soldiers and 780 Airmen in support of the Global War on Terror.

Currently, more than 340 Soldiers and Airmen from the South Dakota National Guard remain on duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations throughout Southwest Asia.

More than 3,800 National Guardsmen are available in South Dakota to provide support for state and national emergencies and homeland defense.